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Large West Texas wastewater spill in Delaware River diluted by rain, BLM says

By Collin Eaton

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Heavy rain may have softened the environmental blow of a large wastewater spill in the Delaware River near West Texas oil fields earlier this month, officials say.

Before dawn on Aug. 1, a few miles south of the Texas border with New Mexico, an over-pressured flow line ruptured and dumped 18,000 barrels of wastewater and 11 barrels of oil into the Delaware River, flowing for seven hours into the Pecos River and the Red Bluff Reservoir before it was discovered.

"Anything this big is a pretty good sized event," said James Amos, a supervisory petroleum engineering tech at the Bureau of Land Management's field office in Carlsbad, New Mexico. "Hitting the waterway makes it even worse."

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The wastewater spill was several times larger than the typical 200-to-300 barrel spills in the region. Scores of fish were killed near the source of the spill. But a rain storm lifted water levels in the Delaware 3 feet higher than normal, diluting the effect of the wastewater spill.

The BLM and other agencies including the Texas Parks &Wildlife Department will

continue to monitor the impact to hundreds of river-dwelling species, including threatened species such as the Texas hornshell mussel.

"It didn't do as much damage as it could have," Amos said. "Chances are very good the dilution may have saved the species."

Denver-based Cimarex Energy, owner and operator of the lease on which the spill occurred, did not respond to requests for comment.

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